

Message Text

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ORIGIN EA-14

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TO AMEMBASSY SAIGON

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

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E. O. 11652 N/ A

TAGS: PFOR, XC, US

SUBJECT: MARCH 22 INDOCHINA PRESS SUMMARY

1. GVN ANNOUNCES MAJOR ATTACK TO RELIEVE RACH BAP FROM COMMUNIST SIEGE; COMMUNISTS MELT INTO JUNGLE. NYT'S FOX SAYS DECISION DRAMATIZES " NEARLY TOTAL IMPOTENCE" OF C- F MACHINERY. ICCS TEAMS WERE REPORTEDLY READY TO INVESTIGATE GVN COMPLAINT WHEN AT LAST MOMENT POLES AND HUNGARIANS REFUSED ON GROUNDS THEY UNABLE OBTAIN VC ASSURANCES THEY COULD ENTER AREA SAFELY. IRRITATED GAUVIN SAYS COMMISSION REFUSED ACT AFTER CANADA' S DEMAND FOR " IMMEDIATE ACTION." HE ADDS: " WE DIDN' T COME HERE TO OBSERVE A WAR. WE CAME TO OBSERVE A CEASEFIRE."

GVN RENEWS CHARGES THAT MOST OF 50,000 COMMUNIST TROOPS AND 300 TANKS ARE ALREADY INFILTRATED INTO SVN (NYT). GETLER QUOTES US OFFICIALS SAYING WHILE THERE HAD BEEN UNCLASSIFIED

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SLOWDOWN EARLIER, TRUCK TRAFFIC MOVING ONTO HO TRAIL INCREASED IN PAST WEEK (WP). FRIEDHEIM ALSO SAYS " MOST" OF MEN AND SUPPLIES SEEN COMING DOWN TRAIL ARE NOW IN SVN IN VIOLATION OF AGREEMENT. ADDS THEY FACE " FORMIDABLE" RVNAF, BUT DECLINES RULE OUT POSSIBILITY OF US BOMBING RESUMPTION IF MAJOR COMMUNIST OFFENSIVE ENSUES. PORTER REITERATES PRESIDENT' S VEILED THREAT TO THIS EFFECT IN GRAND RAPIDS SPEECH, AND BRAY VOICES CONCERN (NYDN).

AND ALL OF MARCH (SUN). SIHANOUK' S AMBASSADOR IN HANOI SAYS PRINCE MAY GO TO ALGIERS FOR SUMMIT CONFERENCE OF NONALIGNED COUNTRIES IN JULY (PHINQ).

7. STAR- NEWS (MAR. 21) NOTES SENATE DEMOCRATIC CAUCUS " OVERWHELMINGLY" APPROVED RESOLUTION CALLING ON PRESIDENT TO CLOSE DOWN " EXCESSIVE AND OBSOLETE" FOREIGN BASES. EXPECTS ADMINISTRATION WILL WORK TO DEFEAT RESOLUTION, SINCE US RETREAT ON SCALE ENVISIONED WOULD UNDOUBTEDLY HAVE DEVASTATING EFFECT ON MILITARY AND POLITICAL STABILITY IN AREAS OF PRIME US CONCERN. IN THAILAND, CONTINUED PRESENCE OF AF PERSONNEL MAY BE CRITICAL IN ESTABLISHING AND MAINTAINING FRAGILE PEACE IN INDOCHINA. ALSO, AMERICAN RETREAT IN ASIA WOULD NOT LIKELY IMPROVE OUR NEW RELATIONS WITH PRC.

8. CROSBY- NOYES (S- N, MAR. 21), IN SAIGON, SAYS SHIFT IN GREAT- POWER RELATIONS WHICH MADE C- F POSSIBLE ALSO MAKES POSSIBLE DEGREE OF CONFIDENCE IN FUTURE OF INDOCHINA. THIS GUARDED OPTIMISM PREDICATED ON CONTINUED US CONCERN OVER VN' S FATE.

9. STAR- NEWS' BRADSHER (MAR. 21), IN HONG KONG, CITES EVIDENCE OF TRUONG CHINH' S POLITICAL DECLINE IN HANOI HIERARCHY. RECALLS TRUONG CHINH WAS LEADING PUBLIC EXPONENT OF ALL- OUT EFFORT TO CRUSH SVN BY FORCE LAST YEAR. BUT WITH ITS FAILURE AND DECISION TO NEGOTIATE C- F, LE DUAN HAS BECOME PUBLICLY MORE ACTIVE.

10. JACK ANDERSON (WP) SAYS HANOI' S MILITARY BUILDUP FOLLOWED ONE BY US LAST NOVEMBER AND DECEMBER. CITES CIA REPORT THAT COMMUNISTS VIEWED THIS AS VIOLATION UNCLASSIFIED

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OF SPIRIT OF NEGOTIATIONS AND IMMEDIATELY BEGAN SHIPPING

EQUIPMENT SOUTH. MASSIVE TURNOVER OF US SUPPLIES TO SVN CAUSED HANOI TO WITHDRAW OCTOBER TRUCE CONCESSIONS, LEADING IN TURN TO DECEMBER BOMBING.

11. CSM' S PEAGAM, IN BAN NASAY, REPORTS ON LAOTIAN REFUGEES. CITES US EMBASSY SPOKESMAN AS SAYING OVER 230, REFUGEES - VAST MAJORITY IN NORTHERN LAOS - NOW RECEIVING US SUPPORT, BUT AID OFFICIALS NOT AVAILABLE TO DISCUSS PROGRAM, PERHAPS BECAUSE IT HAS BEEN CLOSELY RELATED TO CIA' S SUPPORT OF MERCENARY FORCES. LAOS C- F AGREEMENT PROVIDES THAT RLG AND PL ARE TO - HELP REFUGEES WHO HAD TO LEAVE THEIR NATIVE VILLAGES DURING THE WAR TO RETURN TO THEM FREELY IF THEY WISH." OFFICIAL FIGURES PLACE NUMBER OF REFUGEES IN RLG AREAS AT OVER 707,000, MOST OF THEM FROM PL AREAS. TO

RETURN THEM WOULD BE MAJOR UNDERTAKING WITH FAR- REACHING POLITICAL CONSEQUENCES. PRACTICAL DIFFICULTIES ALSO INVOLVED, SINCE ONCE- FERTILE PDJ IS NOW SCRAPYARD OF MILITARY HARDWARE. REFUGEES WILL CONTINUE NEED LARGE- SCALE AID.

12. NYDN' S JERRY GREENE SAYS FRIENDS OF THREE US CIVILIANS CAPTURED IN 1962 SHUDDERED AT FINALITY OF VC ANNOUNCEMENT THAT LAST GROUP OF 32 WAR PRISONERS WILL BE RELEASED THIS WEEKEND. VC ANNOUNCEMENT REFERRED TO MEN ONLY, AND ONE OF THREE CIVILIANS IS WOMAN DOCTOR. ALL THREE WERE WITH CHRISTIAN AND MISSIONARY ALLIANCE, WORKING IN LEPROSARIUM NEAR BAN ME THUOT. NOTES MICHAEL BENGE (IDENTIFIED AS FSO), WHO WORKED ALONGSIDE ALLIANCE PEOPLE IN SVN HIGHLANDS AND RETURNED TO WASHINGTON AFTER THREE YEARS OF NVN CAPTIVITY, WITNESSED TERRIBLE DEATH OF TWO OTHER ALLIANCE EMPLOYEES. ACCORDING TO ALLIANCE PRESIDENT REV. BAILEY, " MIKE KNEW ALL ABOUT OUR MISSIONARY PEOPLE. HE WAS ALERT AND HE INQUIRED EVERY PLACE THEY WENT. BUT HE COULD LEARN NOTHING."

13. LAT (MAR. 21) CONTENDS ONCE LAST AMERICANS ARE OUT OF VN, US WILL HAVE NO JUSTIFICATION FOR RESORT TO ARMS OR THREAT OF ARMS IF ALLEGED COMMUNIST C- F UNCLASSIFIED

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CHEATING CONTINUES. FULL C- F IMPLEMENTATION IMPORTANT FOR VIETNAMESE, NOT FOR AMERICANS. WASHINGTON' S ONLY REMAINING POWER WILL BE PERSUASION. SIGNIFICANT ARGUMENT FOR RESPECTING C- F FLOWS FROM US PROMISE OF AID THROUGHOUT INDOCHINA. PROMISE CANNOT BE KEPT

UNLESS FIRING CEASES. ROGERS

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